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"Closing the Gaps"

Public Health Programs And Services To Prevent Infant Deaths In Massachusetts

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Current Programs

To meet the health needs of women and children, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (Division of Family Health Services) carries out a broad range of activities. The following are among the many current state services and educational programs that provide a sound basis for healthy growth and development of the Commonwealth's children:

- The **Maternal and Infant Care (MIC) Program** provides comprehensive multi-disciplinary care to high-risk, low-income pregnant women through 22 projects located in high-need areas of the state as evidenced by high rates of neonatal mortality, low birthweight births, insufficient prenatal care, lack of private health insurance and poverty. Medical care is provided as well as social services, nutrition counseling, health education, family planning and other preventive health services. (For more information call 617-727-0941.)

  Projected Service Level: 4,500 women

- The federal **Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** provides specific nutritious foods, nutrition education and health care referrals for low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children up to age five who are determined to be at nutritional risk. Special projects include a **Southeast Asian Refugee Project** and a **Breastfeeding Promotion Project.** (Statewide toll-free number: 1-800-WIC-1007.)

  Projected Service Level: 63,000 women, infants and children

- **Specialized Pregnant and Parenting Adolescent Programs** are designed to ensure early identification of pregnant adolescents in order to provide them with educational and social services to meet their special needs. Prenatal, postpartum and infant care are coordinated with other service providers through this program. (For more information call 617-727-0941.)

  Projected Service Level: 1,500 pregnant and parenting adolescents

- The **High-Risk Infant Identification (HRII) Program** is a consolidated comprehensive reporting system from all maternity hospitals in the Commonwealth to identify infants born with low birthweight, congenital anomalies, or other high-risk conditions. This program became fully operational in FY '85. (For more information call 617-727-0944 or your nearest Regional Health Office.)

  Projected Number to be Identified: 8,500 high-risk infants

- Through contracts with all **Neonatal Intensive Care Units** (Level III nurseries) in the state, support is provided for discharge planning and follow-up with community hospitals and service providers to ensure that high-risk infants receive appropriate services after leaving the nurseries. (For more information call 617-727-0944 or your nearest Regional Health Office.)

  Projected Service Level: 6,500 infants

- The community-based **High-Risk Infant and Family Support Program** offers case finding, support groups, home visits, community nursing, service coordination and referral to high-risk infants and their families. (For more information call 617-727-0944 or your nearest Regional Health Office.)

  Projected Service Level: 1,500 families

- The **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Program** is a statewide system which provides 24-hour on-call (617-727-5742) medical and nursing counseling services to families with a SIDS death, payment for autopsy of the infant, home visits, and education/training programs for health professionals.

  Projected Service Level: 110 families

- The **Diethylstilbestrol (DES) Program** offers specialized diagnostic evaluations at approved medical centers across the state for offspring of women given DES during pregnancy. A statewide toll-free number (1-800-422-6237) and educational presentations are provided.

  Projected Service Level: 100 women and men

- The **Environmental Hotline** is a statewide toll-free number (1-800-332-5014) that provides information on the effects of hazardous substances and environmental pollutants on the health of pregnant women and their unborn children.

  Projected Service Level: 3,000 pregnant women, spouses and health care professionals

New Initiatives

To obtain expert advice in determining the Commonwealth's next steps in its efforts to improve infant health, Dr. Bailus Walker, Jr., Commissioner of Public Health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, appointed a Task Force on the Prevention of Low Birthweight and Infant Mortality in the fall of 1984. Chaired by Dr. Julius Richmond, a former U.S. Surgeon General now at Harvard University, the Task Force released its report in May, 1985. "Closing the Gaps: Strategies for Improving the Health of Massachusetts Infants" identified high rates of infant mortality among minority groups, the poor, teenagers, and in certain areas of the state. The report also gave a comprehensive set of recommendations to close the gaps in the range of programs which the Commonwealth offers to address the problem.

The report received considerable attention, and provided support for FY '86 state budget initiatives proposed by House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Voke. The final FY '86 budget contained $6.745 million in expansion funds appropriated to the Departments of Public Health and Public Welfare that will enable the Commonwealth to begin implementation of a number of the Task Force's recommendations in the current year. These new initiatives to further expand services include:

- The promotion of **Public/Private Coalitions** at the local and/or regional levels to address the needs and problems of communities at high risk of low birthweight, infant mortality, teen births and inadequate or no prenatal care. The coalitions will develop strategies to ensure access to comprehensive prenatal and infant care services for these high risk groups. (For more information call 617-727-0941.)

  Projected Service Level: 12 communities

- **A media and outreach campaign** which will provide information on factors promoting healthy birth outcomes, stressing the importance of prenatal care and how such care can be obtained and paid for. (For more information call 617-727-0941.)

  Projected Service Level: Statewide effort

- A committee of representatives from professional organizations will develop comprehensive prenatal care standards for statewide implementation. These standards will emphasize services and interventions to prevent low birthweight, including nutritional, psychosocial, educational and clinical interventions. (For more information call 617-727-0941.)

  Projected Service Level: Statewide effort

- **Healthy Start,** subcontracted from the Department of Public Welfare, is a payor of last resort program for pregnant women who are ineligible for Medicaid, lack health insurance coverage for maternity care, and have incomes below 185% of the federal poverty line, to cover prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care. A statewide toll-free number (1-800-531-BABY) has been established.

  Projected Service Level: 2,000 uninsured women

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